

GORBACHEV URGES LITHUANIA TO STAY WITH SOVIET UNION

BUT SUCCESS IS DOUBTED

A Kremlin Colleague Asserts Secession Is Legal for the Turbulent Baltic Land

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VILNIUS, U.S.S.R., Jan. 11 — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev implored Lithuanians today to remain within the Soviet Union, warning that secession would mean economic calamity for this tiny republic, while weakening Soviet security and endangering his own position and program.

But Yuri D. Maslyukov, a fellow Politburo member who joined Mr. Gorbachev as he started a three-day mission to stem the tide of separatism here, told factory workers that Lithuanians have a legal right to secede by popular referendum and that a law to specify the steps for making and implementing such decisions was being drafted in the Soviet Parliament. For his part, Mr. Gorbachev noted that he would accept such a law but he sought to persuade Lithuanians that the procedures covering a secession would be costly and far from simple, involving negotiations on defense, trade, communications and possible compensation for Federal investments.

Leaving Is 'Possible'

Mr. Maslyukov's views on the right to secession constituted the first explicit acknowledgement by a top Kremlin leader that a republic has the right to withdraw from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Mr. Maslyukov, head of the state planning commission, said, "Our position is that leaving the Soviet Union is possible."

"It is only natural that Lithuanians have the right to decide their fate — to be within the Soviet Union or to leave the Soviet Union," he told workers at a factory on Wednesday, according to an account published tonight in the Government newspaper Izvestia.

This afternoon, a quarter of a million of the republic's 3.5 million people jammed into Cathedral Square here to hear nationalist and local Communist party leaders reaffirm calls for a reconstituted independent Lithuania as they brushed aside the appeal for national unity that Mr. Gorbachev had made earlier in remarkable encounters with nationalist-minded people on the streets of Vilnius.

'I Am the One Who Chose It'

In one spontaneous meeting before the big rally, Mr. Gorbachev used a pleading tone as he said that Lithuanian separation would spell the end of his economic and political changes in the Soviet Union, and strongly suggested it could threaten his position.

"We have embarked on this path, and I am the one who chose it," he said. "My personal fate is linked to this choice. The two states must live together."

The demonstration drew huge

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masses of people who spilled beyond the central square into nearby streets and onto the knoll behind the grand cathedral. The crowds waved placards demanding "Complete Independence" and rejecting Mr. Gorbachev's promise of greater freedom within a restructured Soviet federation.

But Mr. Gorbachev warned that if "someone" succeeded in turning Moscow and Lithuania against each other, "There will be a tragedy."

Impetus to Russian Nationalists

The Soviet President warned repeatedly that any republic's decision to secede would reverberate throughout the union, including Russia, where the Baltic independence movement has already given impetus to conservative Russian nationalists.

"You think it's all so simple?" he said to people at Lenin Square. "If even

member of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, spoke of the Soviet Union as though it were a foreign country as he addressed the rally.

"What was stolen must be returned," he said. "The time has come for intergovernmental negotiations between Lithuania and the Soviet Union."

Mr. Gorbachev did not attend the rally, but in his encounters today with Lithuanians, the first time a Soviet leader has visited Lithuania in the 50 years since it was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, he underscored the interdependence between Moscow and Lithuania.

"Over 50 years, we have become tied together whether we like it or not," he said to a crowd of people lining Lenin Square this morning.

He emphasized the importance of the region's ports and communications lines for Soviet defense, saying, "Our security lies here."

Lithuanian Losses Asserted

In his walkabout at Lenin Square and in visits to a factory and a Lithuanian press club, the Soviet President said repeatedly that with secession, Lithuania would lose billions of rubles of subsidies it receives in the form of Soviet raw materials and products, and would founder in the cruel competition of the outside world.

"Let's give you independence, and establish world prices, and you'll bog down in a swamp immediately," he told the crowd in the streets.

Mr. Gorbachev was dispatched to Lithuania by the Soviet party's governing Central Committee in response to a decision by Lithuanian Communists to bolt from Moscow's control and form an independent party. He is to address the Lithuanian party on Saturday.

But his more urgent mission is to head off the powerful popular movement for restoration of the Lithuanian independence that existed between the two world wars, before Stalin annexed Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia under terms of a secret agreement with Hitler.



President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, on a visit to implore Lithuania not to seek independence, talked to workers during a trip to a factory in Vilnius.

A Politburo member says secession is a legal right.

the slightest suppression occurs, or a misunderstanding, say, in Estonia or Moldavia, it spills over to the rest of the country."

Emmanuel Zinger, a leader of the Lithuanian Jewish organization, speaking at the rally sponsored by Sajudis, the most popular independent political organization in the republic, said: "Lithuania is Lithuania and cannot be partly Lithuanian. It cannot be partly independent, it can only be independent."

The Associated Press reported that Vytautas Landsbergis, who is also a

The Kremlin sees Lithuanian secession as a first step toward a potential fragmentation of the Soviet Union. Certainly fears of such breakup were not lessened by the presence at the rally here of flags of Estonia, Latvia, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and the Ukraine, republics where separatist and nationalist sentiments have been asserted to varying degrees.

Lithuania's two neighboring republics on the Baltic coast, Latvia and Estonia, are also home to strong independence movements. Latvia's Parliament became the second in a Soviet republic to legalize non-Communist political parties. Lithuania voted in December to abolish the Communist monopoly on power, and Estonia is expected to follow suit soon.

The Baltic separatist movements are the most urgent examples of nationalist challenges that have arisen in almost every republic of the country.

But Mr. Maslyukov's comments to factory workers were the most authoritative evidence to date that the Kremlin intends to keep the Lithuanians on board by persuasion, not force.

Law on How to Secede Urged

Noting that a law on secession is now being drafted in the Soviet Parliament, Mr. Maslyukov said separation would require a referendum of all the republic's residents, and should be preceded by "an honest explanation of the consequences of such a step."

Mr. Gorbachev also cited the need for a law explaining how a republic might put into effect the right to secede, which is embodied in the Constitution but has never been translated into a working law, although he was not so direct in endorsing a republic's freedom to leave.

"We need to discuss the time frame for leaving, defense, communications and an entire series of questions," he said in remarks carried on Lithuanian television and reported by Reuters.

Mr. Maslyukov said that if Lithuania seceded, the republic should be responsible for compensating and relocating any residents who do not choose to go along.

"It is difficult to imagine that the collective reason of the Lithuanian nation could decide on such a step," he said.

But after citing statistics that he asserted represented Lithuania's dependence on other republics, he said: "I have had a chance to observe how residents of the republic react with irritation to outside speculation about how much their freedom will cost them in rubles or in convertible currency. And obviously, they are right. It is for them



During a demonstration coinciding with the Gorbachev visit, a demonstrator urged a Soviet withdrawal from the Baltic republics.

to determine their own fate."

From the time Mr. Gorbachev arrived here this morning, he met head on the swelling desire for freedom and self-determination, and some of his encounters were broadcast tonight on Soviet television.

"People have the right to decide their fate," one man shouted at the Soviet President as he mingled with a throng after laying a wreath at a monument to Lenin.

Mr. Gorbachev turned to the man and replied: "Nothing will be decided without you. We will decide everything together."

"Independence" has a range of meanings for different people here, from greater freedom within the Soviet Union to outright secession, and some political leaders in the republic say they hope a compromise can be found short of separation.

Lithuania AT A GLANCE

Government

Lithuania has been dominated by the Soviet Union since the end of World War II. A popular movement called Sajudis has become a commanding political force, however, and has led the demand for an independent Lithuanian state.

History

Under pressure from neighboring Germans, Lithuanian tribes united in the 13th century to form what became a powerful medieval state. Intermarriage among Lithuanian and Polish royalty in the 14th century set the stage for a Polish-Lithuanian union that lasted for 400 years, and, from the mid-17th century, became increasingly dominated by the Poles. With a partition of Poland in 1795, Lithuania was divided between Russian and Prussian control. After the Russian revolution of 1905, a period of cultural renaissance began, accompanied by demands for Lithuanian autonomy. That sentiment continued to gain strength during World War I, when Germany occupied the country. A period of Lithuanian independence followed the war, lasting until 1940, when, after the outbreak of World War II, Soviet troops occupied the country. German occupation followed, from 1941 to 1944, when the Red Army recaptured the area.

The People

Ethnic Lithuanians make up about 80 percent of the republic's population of about 3.6 million, but there are also substantial



numbers of Russians and Poles, and Jewish, Byelorussian and Lettish minorities.

Geography

Lithuania is bounded on the west by the Baltic Sea and Poland. To the north lies Latvia, and to the east and south is Byelorussia. Its size is 25,170 square miles, about the size of West Virginia.

The Economy

Before World War II, Lithuania was predominately an agricultural economy. A period of industrial development began under Soviet domination, with rapid growth taking place in metal products, such as machine tools and household appliances. Lithuania is a major Soviet supplier of radio, television and tape recording equipment, and also has a growing chemical industry.